CBS REPORTS

"Inside the Union"

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With CBS News Correspondent George Herman

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[Industrial noises. . .diesel train whistle. . .radio broadcast over film of Inland Steel plant and East Chicago, Indiana]

GEORGE HERMAN: East Chicago, Indiana, a mill town, the home town of Local 1010 of the Steelworkers union. If you belong to 1010, you work for Inland Steel - 18,000 union workers turning out 23,000 tons of steel a day.

STEELWORKER: A steel town, no doubt about it. As a matter of fact, that steel mill was built first. The town was built around the steel mill.

STEELWORKER: They're not out there to make steel, they're out there to make money. And we're out there to try to protect our lives and earn a living. And it's going to be a constant fight.

STEELWORKER: And nobody knows better what the steelworker needs than that steelworker that's out there doing the work. He knows what he has to have to make that a better life out in that steel mill.

HERMAN: It's not much to look at, but a good place to find out how workers feel about the labor movement and about their union.

[Union song at rally]

Workers had to fight for unions. Not far from here, members of this local fought one of the last pitch battles in labor's struggle to organize, barely 40 years ago. Labor today has established itself, and some say it's as establishment as big business; the labor movement has lost it's way, maybe even it's purpose. Newspapers and television are filled with what the leaders of big labor have to say, but what are workers saying, the 20-million Americans paying union dues?

To find out, we didn't go the AFL-CIO or conduct surveys or examine statistics. Instead, we came here to the biggest local in one of the biggest, most powerful unions in America. We also tried to find out what it's like inside the mill for labor and management, but the mill gates were closed to us. The following hour is what we learned inside the union.

ANNOUNCER: CBS REPORTS: "Inside the Union" - with CBS News Correspondent George Herman.

[ANNOUNCEMENTS]

VISUAL: "Steel barbed wire around The Works.
Steel guns in the holsters
of the guards
at the gates of The Works."

"Smoke and Steel"
Carl Sandburg, 1920

STEELWORKER: I defy you to find a steel mill that doesn't have the barbed wire and guards. US Steel in Gary, they still have what they call a riot gate - big gates that they close when the peasants rise up against them, I guess. And this-- this is their thinking or psychology, that they're still living under that type of syndrome.

HERMAN: We wanted to begin in the workplace, because that's where the union movement began. But after weeks of discussion, except for the gatehouse Inland Steel refused us permission to film inside the mill, and declined to talk to us about the union. We got as close as a telephoto lens could take us.

We went to Inland because it's big and it's successful, and because East Chicago, Indiana, is at the heart of America's steel industry. Things have changed since the old mill towns of earlier in this century, since Carl Sandburg wrote "Smoke and Steel", but things haven't changed completely. Most of the men and women working here probably never read Sandburg's poem, but chances are they'd recognize it even now, sixty years later.

VISUAL: "The anthem learned
By the steel is:
Do this or go hungry."

STEELWORKER: You got to eat. You got to-- you got to have a place to live. And in this area you go to the steel mill. Where I was raised up, you went to the coal mines. And if you was out in Texas, Oklahoma, you'd work in the oil fields. You got to work.

STEELWORKER: A job in a steel plant may be a lousy, low, dirty job, but it pays pretty good money, and that's, of course, is the result of-- of the union. But that's what we're here for, you know. We're here for the money, and we're here for try-- to try to make a life. A guy's got to work, and this to where the jobs are.

STEELWORKER: My next door neighbor, he's been a school teacher here in East Chicago for ten year, and he regrets going to college for four years and becoming a school teacher. I make double what he makes now, and he's got four years of college at Indiana State; over ten years of service in the school system, and I double his wages.

STEELWORKER: Well, I worked there 17 years now. My Dad put 40 years there, and I got four brothers that have worked there, about four uncles, and 25 assorted cousins. So, got a lot invested at Inland Steel.

STEELWORKER: Well, I've been at Inland 23 years, and I can't knock Inland Steel. And as far as a company to work, it's sound and it's secure.

STEELWORKER: I feel I've-- I've always got good benefits from the companies, and they've always treated me right, and I-- so that's why I've stayed with them this long.

VISUAL: "One: 'Jesus, my bones ache;
the company is a liar;
this is a free country,
like hell.'"

STEELWORKER: Well, it's been said that, you know, Inland's not-- not all that bad a place compared with other mills, but basically any steel plant is dirty. It's-- you know, it's-- it's an insult in a way to work in a steel plant.

STEELWORKER: When you go in there, you belong to them. I mean, you're-- you're-- you're their tool to be used. What they want is complete obedience, loyalty. They-- they don't want a man to-- to do anything but just go in there and put out all he can, and then just a little bit more.

STEELWORKER: The hours are ridiculous. They have a right to tell you that you're going to work midnights one day and four to twelve the next. They have the right to tell you you're going to work-- you know, we're supposed to have a 40-hour work week and an 8-hour day. They can schedule you 16 hours a day; they can schedule you 12 hours a day.

STEELWORKER: This is company policy, you know - push, push. Inland's a rough company to deal with. They always have been.

[Roar of blast furnaces]

VISUAL: "A bar of steel - it is only
Smoke at the heart of it,
Smoke and the blood of a man."

STEELWORKER: That's-- that's the formula for making steel. You take so much coke, so much limestone, so much ore, so many men, and grind it all up, and out comes-- out comes steel. That's the way we make it in this country.

HERMAN: What does it mean when you see black smoke or red smoke coming out of a mill?

STEELWORKER: Well, it means death. It-- you know, these are the-- these are the substances that have been linked with cancer, pretty clearly, you know. It's not like some of the hot dog controversies. There have-- There's been enough research done to prove that, for instance, things like benzoapyrene, which is a major constituent of coke oven smoke, is-- is a carcinogen.

STEELWORKER: Not all unsafe conditions you could see visually here, like a broken arm, get your head bashed in, get your leg cut off. There's other type of injuries, like, in a coke plant, injuries to your lungs.

STEELWORKER: It's a hell hole. Summertime, it's hot. I'm in a position of-- a furnace operator were I wear long underwear all year long, summer and winter.

HERMAN: To keep the heat out?

STEELWORKER: It insulates the clothes that I wear; keep from burning my body.

HERMAN: Is it-- some parts of your body are not covered - your face, for example. Does it affect you?

STEELWORKER: And I-- I think you can see right here. I'm not an alcoholic, by no means, but I've got an open hearth brand, and it's right across my face.

[Sound of blast furnaces]

STEELWORKER: People who are used to living in a-- a natural environment, when you go inside there, you're like you're on another planet, in another world. It's-- it's dusty, depressing.

STEELWORKER: Like in the blast furnaces, the old open hearths, you get down into the furnaces and you think it's hell on earth.

STEELWORKER: And I'm the guy that sticks that charge in there, and I'm the guy that takes that chance of that thing blowing out. Now, sometimes that can prematurely blow out and splash steel all over you while you're leaning in to stick the bomb in. That's where you have to be light on your feet. The minute you see a flash, get the heck out of the way. Forget about the bomb, forget about anything. Just turn around and run.

STEELWORKER: I'm a boiler fireman. I deal with natural gas. I deal with blast furnace gas. I deal with oil. If a person doesn't have any idea what he's doing, he can get killed real fast, because gas'll kill you in a minute.

STEELWORKER: And this business of production first and safety last has got to stop, and the only time that it stops is when the-- this company's under the pressure to do something about it.

HERMAN: This is a meeting of grievers, elected representatives of the workers in each department of the mill. It's up to the griever to carry the workers' fight to the company, to see that the contract isn't broken. What remains after a previous generation's struggle for survival is the daily war of the work place, where survival is still an issue.

STEELWORKER: We had a blowout in-- on the blast furnace, and two co-workers were burned. One was burned about ninety percent of his body, and the other one was about sixty-seven percent. Three weeks ago the first one died, and then Friday the second one went. And it's awful hard to tell a young kid that his father got killed and somebody else was the blame, or some of the materials and stuff were inadequate, or poor supervision, or ignorance on the part of his father or complacency.

STEELWORKER: George mentioned here that it could've been several things that contributed to this fatality. But yet, the company comes out and says the men shouldn't have been there. All the accidents that we have to-- in Inland Steel, especially in my department, they'll blame on the men themselves. And I'd like to hear once that it was the company's fault.

STEELWORKER: And it don't make a damn bit of difference to me which one somebody got killed on, as long as they got water pouring on them and they got the wind up on them and they're pushing the hell out of them, somebody's always in a position to where they could get killed. Don't make a damn bit of difference if you get killed on three or get killed on five, you're still dead.

[Sound of radio]

HERMAN: Jim Balanoff was president of Local 1010 before being elected director of District 31, the largest in the union.

JIM BALANOFF: Our problem is better working conditions and improving the lot of the working guy. That's what the people are interested in.

HERMAN: Life inside the mill is governed by the contract, and nothing Jim Balanoff does is more important than facing the company at the bargaining table and his membership in the street.

BALANOFF: Tell him, so he can file a grievance. If he's younger, and you got more seniority, you should have that job.

STEELWORKER: Okay. . .

BALANOFF: Okay. Where're you going? To work now?

STEELWORKER: Yeah.

BALANOFF: Okay.

STEELWORKER: Well, I'll check into it.

BALANOFF: Yeah.

STEELWORKER: But if he drags his feet, then what--

BALANOFF: Hello-- hello. Good-- good-- good to see you.

HERMAN: He worked at Inland Steel 27 years, and returns now to test feelings in the mill, usually just before the early morning shift change.

BALANOFF: . . .the Grievance Committee, you know, or-- or Bill Andrews, the president.

STEELWORKER: Okay, then.

BALANOFF: But Dawkins will go to work.

STEELWORKER: Okay, then. Good enough.

BALANOFF: Yeah.

[To Herman]: You have to, you know, continuously walk the streets, go down to the plant, make plant tours, so you find out really what they're thinking about, you know. And you sit in this office, they come in and tell you what you want to hear. You go out in the streets, you hear what they're really saying.

STEELWORKER: You know, how come the other locals around here got the ten dollars or fifteen dollars tool allowance and we didn't get nothing?

BALANOFF: Yeah, just the Midwest-- the Midwest got that. Well, you know, we-- this time we nailed them for apprentices pay to go to school, you know. And--

STEELWORKER: And what-- what about these safety shoes in the other departments-- or other plants?

BALANOFF: Well, we're going to try to get them this time, you know. You guys are going to have to back us.

How are you doing, Johnny?

[To Herman]: When I'm around here in the East Chicago area, you know, where I've spent, you know, most of my adult life active in the union, there the guys, you know, quite-- talk quite frankly, and some of them are mad, you know. They don't feel that we're doing enough.

STEELWORKER: . . .you do as District 31 director.

BALANOFF: And what's that?

STEELWORKER: Put full-time grievers in Local 1010.

BARTENDER: You want to set 'em all up?

BALANOFF: Yeah.

BARTENDER: Okay.

STEELWORKER: Do what?

BALANOFF: Well, the local's got to do that.

STEELWORKER: Well, what are you?

BALANOFF: Yeah, but I-- I don't run that local. You know, you got a president--

STEELWORKER: What do you mean, the local? Have everybody do it. Youngstown should have it. Inland should have it.

BALANOFF: Full-time grievers.

STEELWORKER: That's right, full-time grievers.

BALANOFF: I don't know. That-- that makes--

STEELWORKER: They got a little crappy-- little crappy local over there at--

BALANOFF: Yeah, over at Chicago Heights there.

STEELWORKER: That's right. And they got full-time grievers. But why haven't we got them? And we're paying twice as much union dues as they are.

BALANOFF: Twice as much as the auto workers?

STEELWORKER: Yeah.

BALANOFF: That ain't so.

STEELWORKER: Oh, no?

STEELWORKER: What you got on your mind in the next contract?

BALANOFF: I don't know.

STEELWORKER: You don't know yet?

BALANOFF: Yeah, well, I got some ideas.

STEELWORKER: Huh?

BALANOFF: I'd like to see what you guys want, but you nev--

STEELWORKER: We want-- we wanted thirty years with full pension.

BALANOFF: You get full pension.

STEELWORKER: Naw! Come on now. What do we get on thirty years now?

BALANOFF: About 450 bucks a month.

STEELWORKER: Yeah, that's all.

BALANOFF: Yeah, well. . .

[To Herman]: You know, you talk about, you know, "big labor" - that's a myth. We were never able to organize more than a-- a third of the workers in the country. Never. If we could say we had 80 percent of the workers in this country organized, then, you know, we got some muscle.

I think labor's starting to wake up, you know, and starting to move in the right direction. You know, we sleep for a while, and then-- then the pendulum goes the other way.

[ANNOUNCEMENTS]

VISUAL: "Smoke, smoke,
Lost in the sieves
of yesterday.
Smoke nights now.
Tomorrow, something else."

"Smoke and Steel"
Carl Sandburg, 1920

[Industrial sounds. . .diesel locomotive horn]

STEELWORKER: Well, I just got angry one day. I got tired of the company running over me, and I thought I could do it on my own. I see you got to have a union to back you, because a one-man war against the company ain't going to work. And I even was thinking about trying to get out of the union a long time ago, and I found out, hey, you need that union.

HERMAN: The need for a union - probably no other issue has been so bitterly fought in America's mills and factories. Starting late in the 19th century, hundreds of thousands of men and women came here to work in the mills. They came to Homestead and Bethlehem, Clairton and Youngstown, Gary and East Chicago - places hardly noticed today, but historic in the making of America's Industrial Revolution. They were immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe; and blacks, immigrants from the American South; and Latinos, Mexican, and Puerto Rican.

[Radio music]

It was places like this that inspired an American idea - the melting pot. They were brought together first in the mill, then in the union: Homestead, 1892; the great strike of 1919; the Memorial Day Massacre, 1937. Those were steel strikes. Labor's heroic age is past, all but lost in the debris of history and on a new generation of Americans.

STEELWORKER: They go through four years of high school learning about the Crusades and the Roman Empire and some stuff that I guess is good, but there's-- there's-- there's a tremendous amount of history right here, labor history. There's no orientation for a guy coming in the mill with the union. There's a-- there's a full day orientation with the company. During that orientation, the company tells them what a great company they are and all the benefits that they give them. "We give you pensions, and we give you insurance, and we give you vacations." And they don't tell them that chances are some of those kids' fathers got shot down to-- fighting to get those things, or their grandfathers. They don't tell them that.

VISUAL: "So ghosts hide
in steel
Like heavy-armed
men in mirrors."

BILL YOUNG: I went in the mill on the 26th day of May, 1922, and I retired the 5th of July, 1973. I called it square.

HERMAN: Bill Young was a union man. His father, a steelworker before him, was beaten on the streets of East Chicago during the strike of 1919. The labor movement may suffer from a loss of memory, but not Bill Young.

YOUNG: I never will forget the first question I ever asked the foreman was, "How much does this job pay?" And he said, "Twenty-eight-and-a-half cents an hour." Says, "We pay you $3 a day and bet you 42 cents you can't stay." I'll never forget that. [Laughs]

HERMAN: What was it like?

YOUNG: What was it like! It was terrible. It was hard. You had nothing to say. You had no rights that the boss was bound to respect. You did as you was told.

JOHN SARGENT: You lined up, and the foreman would say, "You, you, you, work today. The rest of you go home and come back tomorrow," or come back the next day. And you had to report to work every day, and you were just picked out and went to work as-- as they needed you or as they wanted you.

HERMAN: John Sargent was an early president of Local 1010, an office he held four times. He worked at Inland Steel 39 years.

SARGENT: There was no seniority. There were no vacations. There were no holidays. There was no overtime. There were none of the things that people talk about today when they talk about working on a job. You just worked, and were glad to work for whatever time they gave you.

[Music fanfare. . .newsreel film]

YOUNG: Well, conditions was very tough in the mill at that time. The steel was hot, standing before the hot furnaces and steel in the open hearths and places of that kind, where the furnaces sometimes in the open hearths were up to 2300 degrees Fahrenheit. But you worked.

SARGENT: If they like the way you look, you work. If you were a friend of the foreman, you worked. If you could buy the foreman a pint of whiskey, you might work. If you could go to the foreman's house and mow his lawn, you might get a few extra days, or might get a promotion.

YOUNG: They promoted who they wanted to promote, regardless of their qualifications or anything of the kind. They'd promote who they wanted. If the boss liked you, you were promoted; if he didn't like you, you wasn't promoted. And, of course, if you were black, you didn't hope for any promotions at all anyway.

SARGENT: People were just overwhelmed with a feeling that they were just a-- a number, just something in a mill that nobody had any respect for, nobody cared about, nobody paid any attention to.

YOUNG: You had a union then at that time, the Amalgamated, but it wasn't effective because, if the boss found out that you belonged to the union, you'd be automatically and quickly fired. But we had a union then, and I joined it two weeks after I hired. There were seventeen of us. We used to meet in the basement of an undertaker's establishment. We figured that that was the last place the police would come and look for us. They did catch one, though - fellow by the name of William Monroe. And of course the company fired him. And of course, we all hoped for a day of - as we used to call it in the basement in the union meetings - we were hoping for a day of salvation. The day of salvation arrived on the 26th day of May, 1937, when we walked out of the mill.

SARGENT: While we were on the picket line, they came to us and said that Republic was having a hard time - Republic Steel in South Chicago - and they were going to try to augment the picket lines. Would we go down there and help build up this picket line. A great number of us agreed to go down there, and we did.

YOUNG: They had helped us picket the day before then, and it was our turn to go over and help them picket. Just parade up and down the plant. And the police-- we saw the police when we got there, but we hadn't did anything.

SARGENT: And there were kids and men and women, and it was a sort of a-- to me like a picnic more than a picket line. And we got down there and marched to the gate, and were confronted with a line of police, who told us we had-- we could go no further. And while somebody was arguing with the police, we heard some shots.

[Music fanfare. . .newsreel film: striking workers. . .gunfire, shouts]

And first, you-- you didn't-- you didn't believe it, and-- you know, they were going to shoot at you, because nobody was there-- we hadn't done anything, really. We had just marched up to the mill gates. But people start falling right around you, you know. And as soon as that happened, then, of course, they-- everybody broke ranks and tried to get out as fast as they could. And as soon as we started running in the opposite direction, the police then ran after us, you know, and they beat the people unmercifully. And many employees of Inland Steel were beaten pretty bad. Ten men, I think, were killed. Of those ten, I think three were Inland Steel workers, employees of Inland Steel Company.

YOUNG: I had been clubbed. I had a scar on the back of my head there, and it hurt me pretty well and pretty bad the next day. But I was on the picket line the next morning at six o'clock.

SARGENT: The-- the people wanted to belong to a union, and they were going to belong to a union come hell or high water. There was nothing going to stop them from doing it.

HERMAN: Well, how did it work out for you? I mean, your-- you were confident that any union was better than no union for blacks?

YOUNG: Absolutely. It-- how did it work out? It worked out that years later I was able to retire with a pension, something that would-- would have been unheard of before. I had something to say about the wages, hours and working conditions.

HERMAN: You're not going to tell me it was all peaches and cream for a black union man?

YOUNG: No, sir, and still isn't, so far as that concerned. It isn't all peaches and cream for anybody, but they have came-- they've came a long ways from where they were back in those days. You still have problems, and you will always have problems. And when the day comes that you don't have any problem, well then, maybe you just might not need a union. But I don't foresee it.

BILL ANDREWS [President, Local 1010, pounding gavel]: Let's call the meeting to order. I've just been informed that we have very unfortunately lost another one of our union brothers. The other brother that was involved in the accident at the blast furnace has passed away. We would like at this time for a moment of silence.

[Pause]

HERMAN: Deaths in the mill. Charges of forced overtime and discrimination in the mill. Grievances, more than a hundred a month, in the mill. There are still problems for the union.

ANDREWS: Thank you. Now, you remember a couple of . . .

HERMAN: They don't meet in basements any more, but they don't fill the union hall, either.

ANDREWS: . . . after we took the complete package back. . .

HERMAN: Recognition has brought a million dollars into the local's treasury, and apathy into the ranks. It's also brought dissension.

ANDREWS: . . .working on it. Now-- question?

DALLAS: Yes.

ANDREWS: Dallas?

DALLAS: Why can't we go and say, "Okay, then, you have not solved these problems. We'll shut these damn gates down"?

STEELWORKER: Now, we got the right to refuse to do that work, and I'll stand corrected - I know the international representative is here, and he might want to correct me on this, on the legality of it - but I think contractually we can refuse to work with those scabs.

INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE: I have a responsibility to tell the local union that until such time as we receive any directions from McBride, we will not honor that picket line.

HERMAN: McBride is Lloyd McBride, the union's international president, based in Pittsburgh. There's conflict between the international and the local. The way 1010's leadership sees it, they had fought the company for rights as workers, rights they see being lost to a union establishment whose direction they must follow, whether they like it or not.

ANDREWS: There's nothing that we can do that's outside of the realm of our contract. Whatever we can do, whatever McBride says, is what we will do, and that's that. Thank you.

HERMAN: The struggle is no longer just with the company, but within the union itself, over issues that go to the very spirit of the labor movement: the right to strike, the right to ratify contracts - democracy in the union.

STEELWORKER: The people in my plant, when we started talking union a few years back when I-- when I got involved, young guys, even some of the old guys, were saying, "What union? We don't have a union." And I think a large part of that is-- is the result of people not feeling a-- a-- a part of the union, because there's very little democracy in the Steelworkers union. We don't vote on our international contract, and that's one of the things we've been trying to change. We have a no-strike agreement that was signed by the leadership without consulting in any way with the membership that says that, regardless of what we're offered in contract negotiations, we can't strike on an industrywide basis any more. And that really pulled the teeth from the Steelworkers union in-- in terms of contract negotiations.

JIM ROBINSON: And the whole basis of a contract is is that me, as a steelworker, I say, "Under these terms I will work for the next three years." Okay? But I don't get to say that, you know. Somebody else says, "Under these terms, Jim Robinson'll work for the next three years." Well, that's no good. And I remember I hired in the mill in '71, and the contract came up that summer. Saturday at midnight was the contract deadline. The next day I'm sitting in a tavern in South Chicago, and it comes on the TV: the contract has been settled. Well, this is my contract. I mean, how do-- why do I got to learn that from the television that it's been settled, okay?

And why-- you know, why can't I say, "Hey, you know, what are the terms of this contract?" And I'll say whether it's been settled or not, or at least I'll have my one four-hundred-thousandth of a say as to whether it been settled, you know. And that's always left a bad taste in my mouth, and I think it leaves a bad taste in everybody's mouth.

STEELWORKER: Well, what we fear mostly is at the top. We feel like they got out of touch. They need maybe come back and work in the mill every once in a while, they know how we feel. But you catch most people at the top, they ain't been in the mill maybe 15, 20 years.

HERMAN: You're talking about the international?

STEELWORKER: The big-- yeah, the international, McBride. But the little people, we got to go by the laws that they set up, and that's hard to explain to the membership back in the mill.

[Juke box music]

HERMAN: Most steelworkers don't question the need for a union. Many do question what's happened in the union since it was organized, and where it should be going.

MARY HOPPER: And I was in the midst of all that fighting, where we dragged the scabs off the buses and-- you know, all the general fun.

HERMAN: What did you do?

HOPPER: Well, you know, you did what you could. You supported the union.

STEELWORKER: A guy-- a guy becomes active in the union for one of two reasons. Either he's crazy, like Mary Hopper and some of us are, and he wants to really go to work, bust his ass and do a job for the union, or he's just looking for a-- for an easy ride. He's looking for an easy job--

HOPPER: Payroller.

STEELWORKER: --he's a payroller. And those are the kind of guys that, if they don't become union officers, they become foremen. There's no real difference to them. They're part of the so-called American dream. You know, they want to make it-- make it big for themselves, and they don't really give a damn about the union, they don't give-- they-- they have no principles. And there are a lot of them around.

STEELWORKER: See, what we believe is if you look throughout the union, look throughout the country, we've got a situation where you have-- every company the employers are on the offense. It's been happening ever since the 1974 recession. Their profits got hurt, they got scared, they went after the workers. They-- and that's the big difference, political difference, in this union right now.

I believe we have a leadership-- the McBride leadership doesn't recognize that, doesn't believe it. You know, you've got a union leadership, unfortunately, that's been in bed with the companies, and they see this as a way to get some small gains for the leadership over a period of years. It's a cop-out. The companies now are ready to take us on, and they're going to-- you know, they're going to des-- destroy us if we can't get it together and get back to good, solid trade unionism, which means fighting the companies. It's as simple as that.

ANNOUNCER: CBS REPORTS: "Inside the Union" will continue.

[ANNOUNCEMENTS]

[Banjo music]

HERMAN: They work in the mill, but they belong to the union.

[Banjo music. . .union song]

This is a rally, a fund-raiser, a call to solidarity. The rank and file caucus has its roots in the organizing days of the 1930's. Ideals can die easily in places like East Chicago, or they can die hard.

[Music ends. . .applause]

BILL ANDREWS: This is the rank and file slate of Local 1010. We've made a lot of waves. We're going to go down there, and we want to set that convention on its ear, get the right to ratify for our people, for our entire delegation. Thank you. [Cheers, applause]

STEELWORKER: Too long have we had contracts stuffed down our throats from Pittsburgh and told, "This is is, brother. Settle your local issues and go back to work." Even the-- even the man who brings your mail to you, the mailman, he's got a right to say yes or no. Why the hell don't we steelworkers? [Cheers, applause]

HERMAN: Most large unions which negotiate nationwide contracts go back to their memberships for approval. That's not true for workers in basic steel. That's what the right to ratify is all about.

STEELWORKER: Picnic's coming to you through the courtesy of the Rank and File Caucus. Stick around. Plenty of beer. Plenty of hot dogs. Free pop for the kiddies. Enjoy, enjoy!

[Banjo music. . .union song]

HERMAN: The Rank and File is only one political caucus in this local, but it's the one in office. This campaign for delegates to the Steelworkers convention will test its popularity as well as its leadership.

[Banjo music. . .union song]

STEELWORKER [distributing leaflets]: Support your [indistinct] Rank and File. Take time to vote.

HERMAN: Making steel is a 24-hour-a-day business. It never stops. The same is true of union politics.

STEELWORKER: Rank and File! Rank and File! Rank and File!

STEELWORKER: How about supporting United Concerned Steelworkers Thursday.

HERMAN: The opposition slate calls itself the United Concerned Steelworkers. They lose badly. The Rank and File Caucus wins 32 of Local 1010's 37 delegates.

WOMAN: Vote Rank and File! It's important! Vote for your rights! Take this. . .

HERMAN: They intend to challenge the international leadership, to fight for policy changes in the union--

STEELWORKER: Ask them what they done with your [indistinct].

HERMAN: --especially for the right to ratify. They feel they've achieved democracy in their own local, but they're not confident the same rules will apply at the convention in Atlantic City.

LLOYD McBRIDE [President, United Steelworkers]: My fellow officers, sister and brother delegates, distinguished guests, a warm and fraternal welcome to this 19th constitutional convention of our great union. [Applause. . .music]

HERMAN: There are over 5,000 union locals in the United States and Canada, and most of them support Lloyd McBride. [Applause. . .music]

McBRIDE: The beginning of this constitutional convention marks another milestone in the long and proud history of our union, a union that I believe we all agree stands as one of the most progressive and democratic unions in our two countries. Our democratic procedures have been tested and proven, and have worked since our beginning. I'm certain they'll work again this week. Thank you very much. [Applause]

HERMAN: Democracy has always been an issue in the union movement, whether in the work place or in the union.

STEELWORKER: That convention is run in a very undemocratic manner. It's very hard to get on the floor and make changes in policy, make changes in the constitution to-- to reflect what the membership wants.

STEELWORKER: Every staff man in the Steelworkers union is at that convention. Every staff man is appointed by the president. So that gives you an idea of how effective you can be at opposing the-- the leadership's policies. The delegates there are-- they owe their jobs to the man whose policies we're voting on.

[Band music]

STEELWORKER: I'm sure there's good staff people in this union that do a good job, believe in what they're doing, but they-- you know, they're not elected. They don't work in the mill, you know. They don't speak necessarily for the membership.

STEELWORKER: Believe me, you're not going to do nothing if you're standing out in the hall someplace. If you stay up too night-- long tonight drinking beer, and come wandering in there. . .

HERMAN: Local 1010 is not alone; it has support in other locals. But their evening strategy sessions in a nearby motel say more about the odds against them than their chances of overcoming them.

STEELWORKER: And if there's anybody here that can't take a speech from Lloyd McBride that'll take the damn hair, hide and all, off a rhinoceros and then stand back up, brother, you ain't going no place. Believe me, the first thing they do, after they-- after they've fixed the rules here where you can't do nothing, is start their program of intimidation, because they are good intimidators. But beyond that, you know, you just got to stand up. That's the name of the game.

CONVENTION DELEGATE: Point of information. I'm being bullied off the microphone like I was before!

McBRIDE: All right, will you--

DELEGATE: Am I going to get--

McBRIDE: Now, will you-- what is your--

DELEGATE: --and he's doing it again.

McBRIDE: All right, let the brother have the mike. Brother, will you-- will you pay attention now for a minute?

DELEGATE: Mister Chairman, I came--

McBRIDE: You-- you are asking for a point of information--

DELEGATE: Mister Chairman, I--

McBRIDE: --and you will be-- have your point answered, if you will get to the point. Now, you're not going to make a speech under a point of information request. Now, will you sit down, brother, you've asked for your point, and I'll answer you.

DELEGATE: No, I'm-- I'm asking for it. . .

McBRIDE: All right. . .

[Delegates talking on the floor: "We lost one". . ."But this is the . . .in five years". . ."Yesterday there was no list". . ."They got a list with eight names on it". . ."How about you guys--". . ."We been here since 8:30. You don't shut me out. I been waiting to get on this mike for four years"]

HERMAN: They had been surprised by a speakers list, had protested, and it was withdrawn. They've stayed in the hall during the lunch break to be first in line at the microphone.

DELEGATE [1010]: A list like that would effectively block off this mike except for people on the list. They're not-- there was about a dozen names on that list. They're not going to call on 12 speakers from one mike, and we were here at nine o'clock this morning.

PRODUCER IRV DRASNIN: You feel the only way you could get a chance to talk on the right to ratify this afternoon was to stay here and wait in line for the microphone?

DELEGATE [1010]: Well, we're just not taking any chances.

DELEGATE [1010]: We're not taking any chances.

DELEGATE [1010]: And, you know, only once every two years on a convention. That's a long wait.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You going to have to ask permission to go ahead and have your conference in here.

DELEGATE [1010]: Permission of who?

DELEGATE [1010]: Permission to do what, eat a sandwich?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Come on, fellas.

DELEGATE [1010]: Come on what?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: I-- I'm saying this is all over.

DELEGATE [1010]: What's over? I'm not moving.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Well, as far as the conference is going, it's over.

DELEGATE [1010]: What conference?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This conference. . .

DELEGATE [1010]: We're having a conversation here.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Okay, you have it, but have it outside.

DELEGATE [1010]: You mean to tell me we can't talk in this hall?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sure you can.

DELEGATE [1010]: Well then, don't-- you ain't got no right telling us we got to leave to talk.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All right, gentlemen. . .

DELEGATE [1010]: Okay.

DELEGATE [1010]: Okay.

SPEAKER [at podium]: Item three of the resolution on page 63 addresses itself specifically to the matter of contract ratification. It neither favors nor opposes this matter. It simply refers it to our industry conferences. . .

HERMAN: The leadership has tried to defuse the right-to-ratify issue by postponing it. Local 1010 and its supporters want it decided here. They oppose the leadership's view that having basic steelworkers vote on their industrywide contract would undermine the union's bargaining position.

DELEGATE: This undemocratic action. . .

HERMAN: Speakers are heard on both sides, but the vote is never in doubt.

McBRIDE: The question recurs upon the recommendation of the committee, which is to adopt the resolution. Those in favor of the motion signify by saying aye.

DELEGATES: Aye!

McBRIDE: Those opposed to it, no.

DELEGATES: No!

McBRIDE: The motion is carried, and the resolution is adopted.

DELEGATE: Roll call!

MIKE OLSZANSKI [1010 delegate]: Point of order!

McBRIDE: Mike three.

OLSZANSKI: Mike Olszanski from Local 1010. [Delegates shouting]

McBRIDE: Let-- let's have order.

OLSZANSKI: I think this deserves a roll-call vote. The reason-- the reason that we need a roll-call vote is because when I go back to my membership, I want them to know how I voted on it. I hope the rest of the delegates want their membership to know how they voted on it. I vote this resolution down--

McBRIDE: Let's have order, please. Let's have order.

OLSZANSKI: --and I want to be recorded, and I think everybody should be recorded on it.

McBRIDE: All right--

OLSZANSKI: I ask for a roll-call vote, Mister Chairman--

McBRIDE: --will the-- will the sergeants--

OLSZANSKI: --and I also ask to be recorded as voting no.

McBRIDE: Will you be seated, please. If 30 percent of the delegates to this convention want a roll call, a roll call will be taken.

HERMAN: There's no doubt either on 1010's demand for a roll call. There's never been one at a Steelworkers convention.

McBRIDE: The count reveals that there are 316 delegates that were in favor of a roll call. The request for a roll call has failed. [Cheers, applause]

HERMAN: Few other issues arouse such passionate debate, except one - a move to prohibit outside contributions to candidates for high union office. The leadership sees it as a way to keep the union free of outside influence. Local 1010 sees it as an attempt to stop challenges to the leadership. That's the issue. The point is what happened when Jim Balanoff rose to speak against the proposal.

BALANOFF: If you vote for this recommendation, you close the opportunity for thousands upon thousands of people that want to serve this union. This--

[Negative reaction]

BALANOFF: --this resolution--

[Booing]
CHAIR [gaveling]: Order, delegates. Order, delegates. Permit the delegate to speak.

BALANOFF: This resolution closes this union to young people, to others. All this serves is to keep the present officers in office.

[Booing. . .some applause]

Yes, I oppose this resolution, because I believe in democracy. Yes, I be-- oppose this resolution, because it's not in the best benefit of our union. I urge you, for the good of this union, for the good of yourself, to vote this recommendation down, urging the constitutional committee to come back with something that's workable. Thank you.

[Negative reaction from delegates]

CHAIR: Delegates, delegates. I will now put the question. All those in favor of the recommendation of the committee, please indicate by say aye.

DELEGATES: Aye!

CHAIR: Contrary, no.

DELEGATES: No!

COWBOY MEZO [1010 delegate]: These boos and stuff that's heard is orchestrated. This is orchestrated. All right? When a sergeant-at-arms-- when they want boos, they get boos. When they want cheers, they get cheers. And this-- you know, this is not an indication of anyone's feeling. This is an indication of a group of people under the thumb of Caesar.

ROBINSON: And that's why I say this isn't the union. The union's back in the mill, all right? And when we're able to translate that into this convention, then we'll have what we want.

OLSZANSKI: You know, there was a time when Cowboy and Jim Balanoff from our local would go down to that convention in fear of their lives, and nevertheless get up at that mike, that same one, and be the only ones getting up, for ratification, for more democratic procedures, for reforming the dues or not raising them. You know, they'd make these same issues, they'd get booed down by twice as many people. We've made progress, and we can't forget that. We're all down right now, you know. We're having a beer, we're trying to forget what happened. But we shouldn't forget that we've made progress. That was a better hall, that was more our hall. And they recognized it, and they got tougher because of it.

McBRIDE: Well, the rebel isn't always the most qualified guy, but he is a-- he is a charismic guy, and he stands for what we all ought to be for: the little guy who's taken on the big machine. Well, our big machine is a clean machine. Our big machine is a good machine. Our big machine works for the interest of our members. That's a difference in concept. I think if we have a machine, it's a good machine.

HERMAN: What about the right of the membership to ratify their own contracts by referendum votes?

McBRIDE: The progress that we've made - for example, basic steel industry - has been made, I'm convinced, because of our ability to speak with one voice. Suppose we had separate ratification by the membership. We would get our industry out of balance and, in the final analysis, it would be my firm conviction that we would sink to the lowest denominator, because our unions are not all as militant in various parts of the country.

HERMAN: Have union leaders gotten closer to company bosses than to your own membership?

McBRIDE: Whoever you delegate to represent, I suppose, if that representation doesn't come out exactly satisfactory to some person, the hue and cry is going to be, "Yep, well, they sold out. They're too close to the bosses. They're not really care about us. I didn't get my way." Let's examine the record, though, of our union. The people who have been alleged to be close to the bosses down through the years have resulted in, for example, the basic steelworker being the highest paid industrial workers in this country.

HERMAN: Well, now that it's about over, what is your view of this convention?

McBRIDE: Well, I think it was a great convention. I think the will of the majority was clearly expressed, and I have a feeling that fewer people left this convention dissatisfied than ever left a Steelworkers convention before.

[On convention podium]: Those in favor of adopting that report will signify by saying aye.

HERMAN: There are two views of this convention; in some ways, two views of this union: one from the podium, and one from the floor - at least from where Local 1010 sits. This is how it looked to them.

McBRIDE: All those in favor, please indicate by saying aye.

DELEGATES: Aye!

McBRIDE: Contrary, no.

DELEGATES [1010]: No!

McBRIDE: Carried, and so ordered. Secretary of the Committee.

You've heard the recommendation of the committee. All those in favor please signify by saying aye.

DELEGATES: Aye!

McBRIDE: Contrary, no.

DELEGATES [1010]: No!

McBRIDE: Carried, and so ordered. Secretary of the Committee.

Those in favor of the motion signify by saying aye.

DELEGATES: Aye!

McBRIDE: Those opposed to it, no. The motion is carried, and so be it.

[ANNOUNCEMENTS]

HERMAN: It wasn't that long ago that unions were put down by the courts, scorned by the press, and locked out by management; that labor leaders were called un-American, along with the five-day week and the eight-hour day. The labor movement has come a long way in a short time, but its direction is still being questioned by friends and enemies alike. No one union or union local or union member can speak for labor. Labor itself is divided. But it may be that the future of the labor movement, like its past, will be determined here in the work place.

Much has been said and written about big labor in places like Washington and Pittsburgh and Detroit. The voice of the worker in places like East Chicago, Indiana, seems lost in the din of the mill. Not all the issues are new. The point is that they endure inside the union.

ROBINSON: There's all kind of problems. You-- you read in-- in the papers, stuff on television, you know: labor's in trouble, you know, labor law reform bill got beat, common situs picketing got beat, compromise on the minimum wage, you know, and all this stuff. Well, George Meany and them are in trouble, okay? Because I don't see, most of them, they're doing a very effective job of going to their membership and saying, "Look, this is what we've got to do, all right? And we can't do it, because we're just individuals, okay? We can only do it is-- is if we speak for you, all right, and if you-- if we have your backing, All right? Then--" I don't see them doing that, all right? And if they did that, I don't know what kind of response they'd get, because for years they've been saying, "Look, we don't need your backing, we don't want your backing, we don't want you to say nothing, you know. We'll negotiate the contracts, we'll run the union, and you just pay the dues." You know. Two much they've been doing that. And now, I think, you know, the chickens are starting to come home to roost, you know. They're losing, and they don't really know what to do, you know. And-- and this is the sense in which we need a labor movement, okay? And, you know, this union isn't my union and it's not your union or Jim Balanoff or Ed Sadlowski's union or Lloyd McBride's union, you know. I mean, this union belongs to the members that work in the mill, and they're the people that should make those decisions, you know, because that's their right - because that's what the union's there for.

[Factory whistle]

Visual: "Smoke and the blood of
a man.
Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Gary--
they make their steel with men."

"Smoke and Steel"
Carl Sandburg, 1920